

Immunity through Impunity: Hypocrisy and Systemic Racism in Iran's Legal System

by [Aaron Meyer \(/experts/aaron-meyer\)](#), [Rahim Hamid \(/experts/rahim-hamid\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Aaron Meyer \(/experts/aaron-meyer\)](#)

Aaron Eitan Meyer is an attorney, admitted to practice in New York State and before the United State Supreme Court, and a researcher and analyst. He has written extensively on lawfare, international humanitarian, and human rights law.

[Rahim Hamid \(/experts/rahim-hamid\)](#)

Rahim Hamid is an author, freelance journalist, and human rights advocate based in the United States. He is the editor of Dur Untash Studies Centre (DUSC) based in Canada. Hamid's writings often focus on the plight of his Ahwazi people in Iran.



Brief Analysis

Iranian leadership has callously exploited hot button issues for decades, capitalizing on the plight of regional groups like Palestinians and **Shia minorities** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/saudi-poll-public-foreign-policy-sunn-shia-2020>) in the Gulf while maintaining a particular international focus on African American issues in the United States. Iranian officials, most notably Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, make relentless speeches alleging racism and racial discrimination against Black American communities. And yet, the regime continues to enforce its own racist practices inside Iran with little or no consequences.

Activists both inside and outside Iran have been asking the same question for some time: “why is it that the world rises up at a single death in the United States, in Israel, or perhaps in Europe, yet says nothing at our decades of suffering? Why are we left to suffer and die in silence?”

Though mass demonstrations erupted across the world over the murder of George Floyd in the United States, international outcry is muted—and in some cases nonexistent—when it comes to Iranian human rights abuses. It is not merely that the world has low expectations of the regime, but that normal expectations are not compatible with the regime's fundamental ethos or its systemic application of its ideology. The regime escapes sustained criticism because accountability and expectations fall apart when applied to its more than 40-year track record of criminality and oppression.

For many Iranian activists—especially those concerned with minority rights—it can feel frustrating when it seems the world's outrage remains centered on nations who are in some way expected to be 'better' and uphold the principles upon which they are founded. It was notable that the staying of the executions of three young men sentenced to death following the peaceful protests in late 2019 made international news, but international attention came only after great commotion around their sentence. In that case, Iran's own people and expatriates provided the necessary pressure; trending twitter hashtags **#StopExecutionsInIran** (https://twitter.com/hashtag/StopExecutionsInIran?src=hashtag_click) and **#اعدام نكند** (https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AF?src=hashtag_click) initially grew so popular they caused the regime to **throttle the country's internet** (<https://www.newsweek.com/iran-throttles-internet-anti-execution-hashtag-goes-viral-twitter-protests-1517922>) in an effort to silence criticism. Though these millions of tweets may have achieved at least a temporary stay of execution for the three men, five more men have since seen their **death sentences upheld** (<https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2020/07/26/iran-supreme-court-upholds-death-sentence-for-five-protesters/>) for participating in peaceful protests in late 2017 to early 2018.

Such cases are not uncommon. Since Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power, the Iranian legal system has normalized selective application of fundamental legal principles on virtually every level. In Iran, the 'rule of law' is applied through a slew of political 'crimes,' pseudo-religious criminal charges, forced confessions, show trials, deprivation of the assistance of counsel, and a judiciary wholly enmeshed in the state's totalitarian ethos.

Despite arbitrary oppression at home, the Iranian regime hypocritically decries human rights abuses in other parts of the world. On July 27, Iran's Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi referenced an incident when a U.S. fighter jet briefly pursued an Iranian Mahan airliner after it flew over a U.S. military base en route to Syria, stating the act was “not forgivable.” Ironically, Raisi made this statement in the wake of Iran's callous and still unjustified downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 in late 2019.

Raisi himself is an atavistic figure; when **designating** (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm824>) Raisi pursuant to Executive Order 13876 on November 4, 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury pointedly noted that “Raisi was involved in the regime's brutal crackdown on

Iran's Green Movement protests that followed the chaotic and disorderly 2009 election." And Raisi is no outlier. His predecessor, Sadeq Amoli Larijani had been designated in January of 2018 "pursuant to E.O. 13553 for his administrative oversight over the executions of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime and the torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran, including amputations."

Hypocritical official stances and harsh oppression in Iran likewise extend to the country's difficult relationship with race. The Iranian state continues to **systematically oppress** (<https://www.dusc.org/en/articles/5463/>) ethnic Ahwazi people while criticizing systemic racism in the United States.

Regime forces have killed a number of young Ahwazi men in the past few months with little outcry. 15-year-old Omid Eidani was shot in the head by regime police on the roof of his own home on July 7 while attempting to prevent the arbitrary confiscation of his motorcycle—his prized possession—by regime police. Young Reza Torfi apparently missed several checkpoints while on the way home, and was subsequently chased and shot through the lung, kidney and heart, left to die in the street by regime forces. They claimed they suspected him of carrying alcoholic beverages, though no contraband was found anywhere near the young man. Majed Alboghobeish, a 25-year-old from the city of Ma'shour was shot dead at close range while driving his car on the road between Ma'shour and the nearby town of Khor Mousa.

Moreover, the violence against Ahwazis extends beyond the streets. The legitimate fear of dying from COVID-19 prompted Ahwazi prisoners to attempt a jailbreak in late March from Sepidar and the infamous Sheyban prisons. In response, guards killed at least 15 prisoners at Sepidar and twenty from Sheyban, with dozens more re-imprisoned and subjected to torture.

Torture remains endemic in Iranian prisons. Ahwazi rights groups have reported that when 28-year-old Ahwazi political prisoner Basem Batrani was released from Sheyban prison on bail Tuesday, August 11, 2020, he had been tortured so severely for that he suffered permanent spinal damage that has left him unable to walk and in constant, excruciating pain. He and his brothers Ali, Riyad and Hassan had participated in the April 2005 protests when Ahwazis rose up to peacefully challenge the regime's attempts at settling ethnic Persians in exclusive settlements in order to effect demographic change in Ahwaz, as well as systemic racism. Ali Batrani was killed during the uprising, and when his body was recovered it was missing several internal organs as well as an eye.

Riyad Batrani was imprisoned two years ago and released after several months, only to disappear several days after his release. His body was found in the Karoon River. A local Ahwazi rights activist, whose name is withheld in order to protect her from retaliation, visited with Basem Batrani's mother. She expressed her devastation at the murders of two of her sons, the maiming of a third, and of her other detained son Hassan Batrani, who suffered similar torture to that which crippled Basem after the two were arrested on March 11, 2019, on false charges of "propaganda against the regime" and "membership with an opposition group."

Activists both within and without Iran have been asking the same question for some time: "why is it that the world rises up at a single death in the United States, in Israel, or perhaps in Europe, yet says nothing at our decades of suffering? Why are we left to suffer and die in silence?"

As such, for Ahwazis in particular, the Iranian messaging on race and equality reeks of hypocrisy. Notably, the Iranian regime does not even acknowledge the existence of a sizable black Ahwazi population, originally brought to the oil-rich region of Ahwaz by British Petroleum, the Portuguese, and other actors to essentially serve as slave labor. Iran's oil company recently insulted the black Ahwazi community in *Sheikh Shoeyb island* by calling them '**black-faced immigrants from Africa.**' (<https://www.ahwazna.net/15796/>) refusing to recognize black Ahwazis or Ahwazis writ large. Such state-sponsored racism extends to all facets of Ahwazi life. Ahwazis are openly excluded from employment at oil refineries in their own homeland. If hired, they face arbitrary wage reductions, driving an alarming number of workers to commit suicide.

صفحه اصلی - درباره ما - جزیره لاوان

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جزیره لاوان در یک نگاه

الف. موقعیت جغرافیایی:

لاوان جزیره ای است مرجانی و مربوط به دوره چهارم زمین شناسی و در فاصله حدود ۱۶ کیلومتری سواحل ایران (روبروی بندر مقام) قرار گرفته است . موقعیت جغرافیایی این جزیره ۵۳ درجه طول و ۲۶ و ۵۰ دقیقه عرض جغرافیایی است و دارای ۲۰ کیلومتر طول و بین ۵/۴ تا ۷ کیلومتر عرض است . در حدود ۴۵ کیلومتر مربع از قسمت غیر مسکونی و نیمه سنگی جزیره در تصرف شرکت ملی نفت ایران است .

ب. جمعیت:

جمعیت بومی جزیره لاوان در حال حاضر حدود ۱۰۰۰ نفر می باشد .

ج. آب و هوا:

درجه حرارت در تابستان بین ۳۷ تا ۴۵ درجه و در زمستان ۲۵ تا ۱۰ درجه سانتیگراد است . میزان رطوبت نسبی در تابستان ۸۰ تا ۱۰۰

جزیره آورده شده بودند .

ب. جمعیت:

جمعیت بومی جزیره لاوان در حال حاضر حدود ۱۰۰۰ نفر می باشد که تعدادی از آنها مهاجرین منطقه لامرد و تعدادی نیز از بازماندگان سیاه پوستان هستند که توسط پرتغالیها بعنوان برده به این جزیره آورده شده بودند .

جزیره الشیخ

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Beyond government persecution, conditions for Ahwazi youth are overwhelmingly difficult. Most young Ahwazi boys are forced to begin working by the age of 10 or 12, thereby preventing them from pursuing any form of higher education. Meanwhile their young sisters must marry extremely young into often abusive relationships they cannot leave because their families cannot support them. The regime not only refuses to aid, but actively persecutes locally formed human rights organizations. The horrific stories of these young girls, some of whom have self-immolated, remain concealed and unreported.

Indeed, modern Ahwazi affairs are a bleak story, and yet, there is some [hope \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/irans-minorities-are-finding-their-own-voicesamerica-can-help\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/irans-minorities-are-finding-their-own-voicesamerica-can-help). China—currently Iran's largest trading power and premier great power protector—seems to have capitalized upon U.S.-led sanctions to gain lasting concessions in Iran through the 25-year agreement, and the move has created greater attention for the Ahwazi cause.

There is no simple solution. Iran's non-Persian peoples do not want special treatment, but equal treatment. This requires a greater awareness of the suffering of ethnic minorities and a special focus on the Ahwazi, Kurdish, Turk Azeri, and Balochi prisoners who are detained and punished far more severely than ethnically Persian activists, even within an already brutal system. That awareness must drive commitment to spur the long-belated imposition of rule of law for its peoples. The regime's arrogance has been allowed to perversely protect it from the full consequences of its systemic crimes. Masses from around the world have arisen to decry some injustices, even as the remaining great powers jockey anew for positioning around the globe. Perhaps this unique convergence—if sustained—can open the door for real human rights for all the peoples of Iran, but first the regime must be stripped of its cloak of impunity. ❖

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